

VICTORIAN ELEGIES

1.

Everyone, the Secretary of State, Robert Redford, the Manhattan D.A., the high level mobster, was wearing my tie -- the blue one with orange poka dots.

I told my wife and friends.

My tie, I said, pointing to a guy at the hockey game. My tie, I said, pointing to Walter Cronkite.

They nodded and looked straight ahead.

One night, Chet the bartender had it on. I yanked him half across the bar.

'Take it off, sucker.'

He did.

Next morning, when I opened the front door, they were on my doormat, twelve blue ties with orange poka dots.

My neighbor was getting into his Mercedes.

'Hey,' I said, tapping my chest, 'forget something?'

He took it off, dropped it on the pile and drove off.

2.

I flew to Chicago and took a cab to Larry's. He saw me from his study and came running out, hands high.

We grappled.

'Son of a bitch,' he screamed.

His wife separated us.

Next, to Houston. I found Meg in a hospital.

'All these years,' she whispered.

I kissed her, fell on her, fondled her breasts. A nurse pulled me away.

I took a cab downtown. Morris froze in his glass office.

'You ...' I began, kicking open the door.

He beat me to it. 'Lazy, cheap, insensitive, crook ...' he shouted, lips turning purple. 'You're fired. Fired!' He fell into the arms of his secretary.

I took the train home.

3.

The new guy, Chico, couldn't do enough. Every time I came in, he bounced over. 'Yes sir, may I help you sir?'

But something happened. He got bags under his eyes. He folded his arms. I found my own pens, my own type-writer ribbons and put them on the counter.

'I'm late, Chico.'

'Don't bug me, o.k.?'

Next day, at work, I watched the maintenance man pry open a window. He looked like Chico, only resigned, sad. I took him over to the store.

Chico took one look and walked out. I showed him to Ted, the owner. He nodded, patted his arm, and gave him Chico's jacket. A perfect fit.

4.

She woke me.

'There's something.'

I put on the light. A spider was on the head board.

'Kill it,' she said.

I did.

'Just think,' I said after a while, 'the Daddy spider had a cookie crumb. He was bringing it home to the Mommy

spider and the Baby. They're hungry and cold.'

'Stop,' she said.

'The baby will start crying, Mommy, where's Daddy, where's Daddy?'

'Please.'

'And Mommy will hug him and say, just you wait, Daddy's coming home with a big cookie crumb.'

She started crying.

Next morning, over breakfast, we were talking money. A green bug ran across the napkins and I crushed it under my thumb. She jumped up, pulling at her mouth.

5.

At a quarter past three, I got up from my desk, went into the cage and shut the door.

A secretary came by, laughed, and tossed a cup of water at me.

Next, Higgins. He avoided my eyes, slipped a ten through the bars and hurried away.

The supply clerk with the Hitler haircut put down his box of toilet paper. He pointed at me.

'Ha, ha. Ha, ha.'

At precisely three thirty, I opened the door and went back to my desk. Higgins and the secretary got into a fight over who was next.

-- John Lowry

Brooklyn NY